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INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS MONROVIA 000103

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

PLEASE PASS OPIC FOR JAMIE EKERN

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [EINV](#) [EFIN](#) [ETRD](#) [ECON](#) [OPIC](#) [LI](#)

SUBJECT: LIBERIA: AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF MONROVIA (FOR OPIC)

¶1. (SBU) The American International School of Monrovia (AISM) was established in 2007 with the strong encouragement and support of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The GOL provided the land and building, and sees AISM as an essential element in creating a climate that will facilitate foreign investment and return of Diaspora Liberians. The USG supports the school as an aspect of "normalization" that will permit Embassy Monrovia to return to being an accompanied post. (Note: Currently only adult dependents are permitted at post. End note.) The GOL remains strongly committed to the success of the school.

¶2. Future growth depends on an increase in school-age children with the financial resources to afford AISM's fees. Realistically, that pool includes expatriates transferred to Liberia by their employers, Liberians who decide to return to Liberia from successful careers in the United States, and, eventually, Embassy families. There is also potential for growth from families currently resident in Liberia who have their children in other private schools. The number of students increased from 41 in the first year to 63 at the start of 2007-08. We have heard from current AISM parents that the school's successful two-year track record has inspired confidence, and PTA members expect an increase in enrollment from students now in other schools.

¶3. Liberia's economy continues to grow despite the global financial crisis. According to National Investment Commission figures, investment grew 36% in 2008 compared to the previous year and concession agreements signed this year have already exceeded the 2008 mark. Liberia is entering the sixth peaceful year peaceful post-conflict and growing confidence among Liberians in the Sirleaf administration's policies is reflected in a surge in domestic building, farming and other investment.

¶4. AISM's future is bright but the school does face short-term challenges. Due to the strong pressure from President Sirleaf the school's opening may have been slightly premature. The previous Board made the ambitious decision to start as a pre-K through 9th grade school, which put a strain on teaching and other resources. AISM incurred extensive debt due to the need for pre-occupancy renovation of all aspects of the building except the concrete walls, and incurs high costs to self-generate power and provide security. Despite the financial challenges, it has benefited from strong parental commitment. The new PTA is functioning well, and parents self-financed renovation and furniture for two additional classrooms in 2008.

¶5. Post is not aware of any potential ties to terrorism, money laundering, corruption, or violations of law. (Note: AISM's charter requires that four of the nine members of the Board be Embassy direct hire employees. Post's management officer is chairman of the AISM Board. The Ambassador, RSO, and Econoff also serve on the Board. End note.)

¶6. Comment: AISM is a high priority for the USG, as demonstrated by active involvement by the current and former Ambassador on the AISM Board. There is no alternative in Liberia for parents seeking an international-standard education. The project has encountered

challenges similar to those facing other new investment in Liberia but commitment by the stakeholders -- the parents -- is strong and growing.

THOMAS-GREENFIELD